



# FORUM

Facts, Outcomes, & Research... Useful for Managing

## WHAT WORKS IN OFFENDER PROGRAMMING

"It's de ja vu all over again." (Yogi Berra)

BY TOM ALDRICH

What works in offender programming? Over the years, the pendulum has swung from the point that anything can work to the point where nothing works. Recent studies have appeared showing that offender programming does indeed work, but also that success depends on program implementation, an optimal mix of programs, linking programs in prison to programs after release, and recognizing that different offenders have different needs.

When evaluating programs, one challenge facing the corrections field is that we cannot conduct experiments on offenders. We are ethically compelled to avoid randomly assigning a group of offenders to either a treatment group that undergoes a program or a control group that does not. Rather, researchers examine those offenders who choose or are chosen to enroll in programs and compare them to those who don't. Thus, where we do see a positive effect from programming, the effect may result from the self-selection of offenders who enrolled in the programming and who were more motivated and thus more likely to succeed.

One interesting exception to this research dilemma is a recent study by Fretz, Helbrun, and Brown (2004) for the New Jersey Department of Corrections (DOC). Fretz et al. evaluated treatment by the Community Education Centers (CEC) that was integrated, took individual offender needs into account, and linked to continued programming upon release. The CEC program was also primarily cognitive-behavioral. Unlike a true experimental design where offenders would be randomly assigned to either treatment or non-treatment (control) groups, they randomly drew a sample of CEC participants and then randomly drew a sample of nonparticipants from DOC offenders released from work camps. Thus CEC participants were not randomly assigned, introducing the difficulty noted before that improved performance by participants could result from the selection process rather than the treatment. However, in this case, the treatment group exhibited characteristics that would have made them more likely to be rearrested or reconvicted. The treatment group was younger, all male, had a more extensive criminal history, and had serious substance abuse problems. Each of these factors has been associated with increased rates of rearrest or reconviction.

While it might have been expected that the control group would do better than the treatment group, in fact the treatment group did far better. For example, six months after release 19.8 percent of the treatment group was rearrested while 30.5 percent of the control group was rearrested. They also compared this data to Bureau of Justice Statistics data indicating a rearrest rate of 29.9 percent after six months. While one study alone does not confirm the value of any treatment, this study offers hope both for the value of offender change programs and for dealing with the challenges of non-experimental program evaluations.



## FOR YOUR INFORMATION..

### BOOK/PUBLICATION OF THE MONTH

Ralph Fretz, Krik Heilbrun and Devon Brown "Outcome Research as an Integral Component of Performance-Based Offender Treatment." Corrections Compendium. Volume 29, No. 4. July/August 2004.

### WEB SITE OF THE MONTH

<http://www.aca.org/publications/ctmagazine.asp> - Corrections Compendium Website

### DEFINITION OF THE MONTH

**Treatment group:** The group that will experience the treatment, i.e., enter the program.

**Control group:** A comparable group that will not undergo the treatment, i.e., they will not enter the program.

**Random assignment:** A procedure that randomly allocates a sample of offenders to either the treatment group or the control group.

### DOC MONTHLY STATISTICS AS OF AUGUST 31, 2004

#### CONFINEMENT POPULATION .....

Total Confinement ..... 17,223  
Work Release ..... 16,185  
Out of State Rented Beds ..... 611  
Out of State ..... 427

#### COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS POPULATION

##### ACTIVE SUPERVISION .....

RMA ..... 30,205  
RMB ..... 7,916  
RMC ..... 6,700  
RMD ..... 2,692  
Unclassified ..... 11,257  
Unclassified ..... 1,640

##### MONETARY .....

MONETARY ..... 4,242  
INACTIVE STATUS ..... 17,238

### ESCAPES FROM SECURITY LEVELS 2-5, FOR FY05

	Date	Type	Return
Coyote Ridge CC	07/14/04	Facility	07/15/04
Olympic CC	08/13/04	Facility	-----

For FY 2004 an escape from TPR on 6/13/04 was incorrectly reported as an escape from PLPR.

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## COMMUNITY POLICING OFFICE DEDICATED

BY RAENETTE CAMPBELL

On August 12, 2004, a long awaited event took place in Rochester, Washington. The Remi Hansen Community Policing Office was dedicated. This endeavor, which was sponsored by the Rochester Weed and Seed Organization, has been in the planning for several years. The Olympia Central Field Office has been a community partner of the Rochester Weed and Seed organization for several years. This federally funded program is designed to fight and prevent drug use in communities. The Community Policing Office is located in a vacated primary school building which sits on the main street of Rochester. The



JOICE HAGEN (LEFT) AND RICHARD JORDAN (RIGHT) WILL SUPERVISE THE OFFENDERS RESIDING IN THE ROCHESTER AREA